



State of Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission

Office of the Governor

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Report submitted to: St. Tammany Parish Animal Control Officials and St. Tammany Parish Government

Date of Audit: December 15, 2009

Representatives of the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology Section, recently completed an audit of your shelter facility located in Lacombe, Louisiana. The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission (LAWC) is very grateful for your cooperation in the audit. The goal of this audit is to assist local and parish governing agencies in evaluating shelter facilities and planning improvements. Please accept the following comments in the constructive manner in which they are intended.

The St. Tammany Parish animal shelter provided OPH personnel ready access to animal and personnel records. The shelter staff was very accommodating and shared information freely. Evidence of adequate record keeping was observed by the inspectors. In fact a computer program utilizing digital photographic identification is employed to track each animal from admission into the facility to final disposition. The shelter provides services to the citizens of St. Tammany Parish during regularly scheduled business hours. Fees are registered with the parish. A security system is present throughout the shelter and cameras monitor the activities of the staff. These activities are also easily monitored in real time by shelter management.

A very attractive, modern enclosed waiting area greets visitors to the shelter. The shelter accepts many different species of animals, including nuisance wildlife, and provided ample documentation of an effective program of returning such animals to the wild.

Storage of food and medical supplies, and carcass disposal procedures are superb and adequately address the needs of the facility and the security of the supplies. Supplies are strictly separated by category in separate storage areas. Lighting is excellent throughout the facility. Primary animal enclosures appear to be well maintained and are in an excellent state of repair. Sanitation methods exceed acceptable standards of shelter hygiene. The availability of hot and cold water throughout all areas of the facility is extremely useful in maintaining an effective program of shelter hygiene. A private company provides the shelter with a regular program of pest and rodent control. Veterinary care is provided immediately to animals in need and the shelter population is continuously monitored for health problems. Isolation areas for animals suffering from potentially contagious diseases are maintained as best as the facility permits. Vaccine, parasite control and spay/neuter policies meet accepted standards in Louisiana and shelter personnel demonstrate a basic knowledge of infection control. St. Tammany Parish animal shelter electronically scans each animal for the presence of microchips upon entry into the shelter, thus providing a means of identifying owners to facilitate the animals' return. Records of employee training are excellent and the staff continually participates in extramural continuing education programs as well as formal in-house training.

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The shelter maintains a separate room and table for euthanasia procedures and all euthanasia is performed by certified animal euthanasia technicians. Lethal injection, the preferred method of euthanasia in most pet species, is the exclusive method of euthanasia employed at the shelter.

Euthanasia is authorized by the shelter supervisor, shelter director or the shelter veterinarian. Animals selected for euthanasia are included on a list that is subsequently given to a certified animal euthanasia technician (CAET), who carries out the procedure. Before the euthanasia list is transferred to the CAET, an additional employee of the shelter (director, assistant director, or other designated employee) must verify that the animals scheduled for euthanasia are not adoptable either due to temperament or for medical reasons. This two-tiered approval process helps to assure appropriate evaluation of animal status prior to euthanasia.

The shelter abides by a policy of holding animals that are deemed "un-adoptable" for a minimum of one week before final determination of fate. Determination of adoptability includes a very effective, evidence based temperament testing component. The successful, active adoption program is enthusiastically supported and promoted by the shelter staff. This adoption program makes effective use of a large capacity mobile "adoption" and "public education" van. The van can accommodate between 36 and 43 animals, depending on size. The adoption program is active at several off-site venues, such as local festivals and fairs, shopping malls and pet shops. Educational activities are conducted at schools in addition to the locations already mentioned.

The staff and management of the facility strive to keep cage density (the number of animals confined to individual cages) to a minimum. The shelter is able to provide ample space for each animal, despite fairly high intake numbers. The adoption, reclamation and rescue programs assist in maintaining a manageable shelter population.

LAWC recognizes the importance of written policies for procedures at public animal shelters. The staff of the St. Tammany Parish Animal Shelter is governed by several standard operating procedures spelled out in documents dealing with shelter management and operations. St. Tammany Parish provides written policies for shelter hygiene, employee training, isolation of animals, euthanasia, feeding, and shelter oversight. These protocols assist in training employees and reduce chances of inadvertent errors.

I. The following suggestions are made based on the state statute (R.S. 3:2461, et seq.) listing minimum standards that may be adopted by public governing authorities:

A. Adequate local supervision: Louisiana law states that "shelters should be inspected at least once every six months by an authorized representative of the parish to determine compliance with the requirements" set forth in state statutes. Although the supervisory structure of the shelter was thoroughly explained to the auditors, no written record of a formal system of inspection by any parish official was brought forth. LAWC suggests that the parish establish a regular program of inspection and document the results for later examination by OPH auditors. This system of inspection should be recorded in a written policy.

B. Posting of fees: The fees for shelter services are not obviously posted in the waiting area. Based upon state law, LAWC recommends that the fees be "visibly" posted. LAWC recommends that the fees are displayed in a manner that is apparent to shelter visitors, e.g. in large font on an appropriate sign or poster. After the inspectors departed the facility, they were informed that a large sign to post fees had been ordered for display in the lobby.

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C. No emergency phone number was posted on the exterior of the building. The state standard is that "hours of operation and emergency telephone numbers shall be prominently displayed." LAWC suggests that emergency after hours contact information be posted in an obvious position near the entrance of the building. The shelter corrected this deficiency within days of the inspection.

D. The Louisiana Revised Statutes state that "shelter shall be provided for all dogs and cats kept outdoors when atmospheric temperature falls below fifty degrees Fahrenheit," and that "the ambient temperature...not be allowed to fall below fifty degrees Fahrenheit." Animals in the outdoor unheated open dog kennel are not protected from the cold, thus the area is unusable during extremely cold weather. Electric or gas heaters would improve the situation dramatically. The shelter should consider enclosing the structure and providing adequate heating and ventilation, should assets become available.

Adoption of the following practices should serve to improve the public image of the facility, enhance health and safety of the animals and workers, and/or decrease the likelihood of legal incidents and public complaints.

II. Suggestions by LAWC to improve shelter management:

A. St. Tammany Parish Animal Control abides by Article V, Animal Control, of the parish ordinances, which deals with minimal animal care standards; animal confinement; cruelty to animals; nuisance or stray animals; vicious, dangerous animals or exotic animals; and rabies control and licensing. Many of the standards for Louisiana public shelters specified in the Louisiana Revised Statutes are included in the minimal animal care standards specified in the ordinance. Nevertheless parish law does not specifically apply the standards to the shelter. Parish government is strongly urged to include specific shelter standards in Parish ordinances.

B. Washrooms and Plumbing: The Louisiana Revised Statutes state, "Facilities such as washrooms, basins, or sinks, shall be provided to maintain cleanliness among animal caretakers." Some animal wards or animal contact areas have no wash basin present. The shelter should consider installation of hand sanitizer stations in these areas of the facility. At the conclusion of the audit, this facility placed an order for several hand sanitizer stations and will be installing the stations in the near future.

C. Inspectors observed a medical isolation area for larger canines in the exterior kennels. These kennels cannot be utilized in cold weather. If assets become available the shelter should consider construction or creation of a dedicated observation and/or isolation ward for larger animals that is protected from the elements.

D. Plastic food/water bowls and plastic litter pans are utilized in several animal cages. These types of containers may be chewed by animals and can deteriorate with time so as not to permit thorough disinfection. LAWC recommends that, if use of plastic bowls and litter pans is a necessity, these items be monitored closely for pitting and damage, and be replaced as necessary. Shelter management recognizes the benefits of stainless steel items and would prefer use of better quality bowls and pans; however present budget limitations preclude acquisition of the items.

E. Louisiana's revised statutes state that "dogs shall be separated from cats." This shelter complies with this requirement and these species of animals were never observed to be housed in the same primary enclosure. The inspectors observed a dog present in the stray cat ward and kittens present in the puppy

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adoptable ward. To minimize stress to cats and dogs, the staff is encouraged to separate cats and dogs by ward also, if possible.

F. At present, parish policy does not address the reproductive status of animals that are chronically found straying from owner control. The commission recognizes the danger of intact animals that are repeatedly permitted to roam free. In order to address the impact of this behavior on pet overpopulation, St. Tammany Parish is encouraged to implement policies or ordinances that mandate the spaying and neutering of such animals.

G. The walkways in the shelter were very damp. The surrounding area had been drenched by heavy rains during the previous few days. Inspectors suggest that temporary fans be installed in the hallways in conditions such as these, therefore reducing the chance of injury to workers or the resident population.

This concludes the report. OPH will request the statistics from calendar year 2009 in early January. Please be vigilant for the request.

Thanks again to the St. Tammany Parish Animal Shelter for its cooperation in this audit. LAWC recognizes the shelter's dedication to humane animal control and animal welfare in Louisiana.

Submitted by: The Louisiana Animal Welfare Commission


Joelle Rupert, Commissioner

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